



HELPING HAND: Kim Gonzalez of Fries is pictured with three of her five girls. Gonzalez left Sept. 22 for the Gulf Coast to help Hurricane Katrina victims.

Fries woman lends hand. Hispanic interpreter travels to gulf

By E.A. SEAGRAVES
Staff

FRIES - A Fries woman left her five daughters and headed to Gulf Coast last week to help Hurricane Katrina victims, even as Hurricane Rita approached.

Kim Gonzalez was not sure what she would be doing in Baton Rouge - or even if that's where she'd end up volunteering.

Gonzalez is an interpreter with the Virginia Department of Health, Radford Health Clinic and the Southwest Virginia Community Health Clinic with the Migrant Health Network. She has worked as an interpreter for eight years.

She doesn't have any disaster relief or American Red Cross training, but she just trained with The Medical Reserve Corps and has CPR certification.

The Medical Reserve Corps was established to provide coordination of health care professionals in local communities during emergencies. Kristina Morris, Medical Reserve Corps coordina

tor, said.

It was formed with the intent to respond to manmade and natural disasters at a local level, but with the scope of Hurricane Katrina, the corps developed a national relationship with the American Red Cross.

Morris said the corps has 260 active members and 175 waiting for training. The unit is open to community members and health professionals, although 90 percent of the 260 members are health professionals.

The corps is always seeking volunteers, and is part of Citizen Corps, an umbrella organization for The Medical Reserve Corps, Volunteers in Police Service, Community Emergency Response Teams and Neighborhood Watch Program.

The corps also serves as a liaison for the American Red Cross, helping to connect volunteers to Red Cross efforts in the Gulf Coast. The application takes an inventory of the applicant's skills and training.

Morris said three other appli-

cants from Southwest Virginia are waiting for Red Cross approval.

Volunteers usually spend three weeks on a mission, but Gonzalez had to cut her service short to be back in Grayson for the pine tree season. She returns Sunday.

While she is gone, family members took care of her five daughters, ages 2 to 11.

Gonzalez hopes the experience is something she can use in this area if an emergency takes place.

"If it had happened here, I would want someone to come here and help my family out and see that our needs are met," she said. "You never know what could happen here."